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Characterization and the Fourth Gospel

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER I ANALYZED THE VIEWS OF RILEY, DeCONICK, and Pagels in order to get a clearer picture of the assumptions driving their respective methodologies. Each author is driven by historical-critical assumptions that show a concern for the world behind the text,¹ specifically the complex world of early Christianity. Each author also incorporates narrative-critical assumptions that address the world in the text,² specifically the use of a character for rhetorical and polemical purposes. Since this study is concerned to test the claims of the community-conflict hypothesis regarding the characterization of Thomas in the Gospel of John, I am especially concerned here with the worlds *in* and *in front of* the text of the Fourth Gospel.

The approach adopted in this study is based upon the assumption that, despite its historical elements³ and literary apo-

1. Schneiders devotes an entire chapter of her *Revelatory Text* to the discussion of this approach to the biblical text. She defines the “world behind the text” as “a window on the ancient world through which one can discern, to some extent, the author(s) and her or his historical, theological, and ideological agenda as well as the community to which the text was originally addressed and the ancient world in which that community lived” (113).

2. Schneiders (*ibid.*, 132–56) refers to this as the world *of* the text. She describes it concisely as the “text of linguistic system and mirror” (*ibid.*, 113), which is essentially the world reflected in the events of the story.

3. A great deal has been written both denying and asserting the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel. The trend in more recent historical Jesus studies has been to deny that there is much historical value in John’s Gospel. There have been other attempts, however, to make a sustained case for the general historical reliability of John. See, for instance, Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel*. For an approach that recognizes and seeks to balance both the literary and historical elements of the Fourth Gospel, Moloney, “Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History.” See also the section in Fortna and Thatcher, *Jesus in the Johannine Tradition*, 35–101, entitled “The Fourth Gospel and Jesus,” which consists of chapters about situating John’s Gospel in history,

rias,⁴ the Fourth Gospel displays a remarkable literary unity. This unity allows the text to be read as an autonomous narrative as well as a work of art.⁵ An appreciation for both the literary unity and the artistry of the text has the potential to provide many substantive insights into the rhetorical strategy behind the Gospel's message. These insights are drawn from the methodologies of contemporary literary scholars that have been integrated into the discipline of biblical studies.

Over the last three decades biblical scholarship has been increasingly open to the application of contemporary literary theory to the narratives of the Hebrew Bible and the NT.⁶ The history of this important development does not need to be reviewed here, but several important elements need to be outlined, as they figure prominently in the following chapters.

The Gospel of John was composed by a real author for an original audience of real readers. Much of the original context of the Fourth Gospel is foreign to the modern reader who is unfamiliar with Koiné

historical traces in the Fourth Gospel's Palestinian awareness, and general thoughts on the historical reliability of the Gospel.

4. The so-called *aporias* of John's Gospel have been a topic of serious discussion among Johannine scholars. The term is taken from the Greek ἀπορία, "perplexity" (BDAG, s.v. ἀπορία) indicating a "difficult passing." Passages identified as *aporias* appear to represent a seemingly displaced unit or an untidy literary seam. The earliest publications on the issue of Johannine *aporias* were Schwartz, *Aporien im vierten Evangelium* (1907); and Lewis, *Disarrangements in the Fourth Gospel* (1910). In the context of discussing Johannine composition and sources, Fortna (*Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor*, 1–11) addresses the import of the Johannine displacements. See also the chapter in Brown, *Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 41–89, entitled "The Unity and Composition of the Fourth Gospel" for a historical overview of scholarly views on sources behind the Fourth Gospel.

5. To speak of the "autonomy" of the narrative is to assert that the story is able to stand on its own without assistance from the stories related by the Synoptic evangelists or other noncanonical gospel writers.

6. General introductions to biblical narrative and reader-response criticisms include Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*; Fokkerman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*; Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*; McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible*; Moloney, *Beginning the Good News*; idem, "Narrative Criticism of the Gospels"; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; and Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives*. Culpepper's seminal work, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, is the proper starting point for those interested in the early evolution of NT narrative criticism and its application to John's Gospel. His general approach has been systematically applied to the Fourth Gospel in three volumes by Moloney: *Belief in the Word*; *Signs and Shadows*; and *Glory Not Dishonor*.

Greek and with the societal norms and religious symbolism of the first century.⁷ Still, the Fourth Gospel continues to resonate with modern readers in a way that reveals the universal qualities of John's story of Jesus. This does not mean that the reading experience is solely dependent upon the whims or perspectives of the modern reader (or the reader of any era), as some postmodern theories of reader-oriented criticism have argued.⁸ To be sure, the "lenses" through which each reader sees the narrative are important. More important, however, is the significant interchange that occurs between what the text presents to the reader and what the reader brings to the text. Recognizing and balancing these elements of the reading experience is critical for the development of a responsible narrative-critical hermeneutic.

Historical-critical scholars have discussed primarily the world behind the text in order to discover what the text presents to the reader. The concept of authorial intent has been an important assumption driving the scholarship of many in historical-critical circles. While many of the insights of historical-critical scholarship are valuable and need to be incorporated into narrative reading strategies, authorial intent can-

7. Outi Lehtipuu speaks to this difficulty as it applies to the biblical narratives in general. He writes, "The interpretation of biblical narratives faces several obstacles. A major problem is the temporal distance between the modern readers and the origins of the biblical texts. Both the text itself and its extratextual context are alien to us. This creates at least two kinds of difficulties. First, the stories contain terms that are altogether strange to us. For example, what does the expression 'Abraham's bosom' (NRSV: 'side') mean? Or what kind of a place is Hades? Second, there are familiar terms that do not necessarily bear the same meaning as today. For example, do the conceptions 'rich' and 'poor' refer to the same kinds of socioeconomic realities as today? A great chasm has been fixed between our world and the world of the story by time and cultural changes, and we must be cautious not to give anachronistic meanings to familiar sounding conceptions found in ancient texts" ("Characterization and Persuasion, 74).

8. At the beginning of his first volume on biblical criticism and postmodernism, Fernando Segovia advocates just such an approach when he writes, "The essays that follow represent the contributions to the first stage of the project, dealing with diversity in the American scene as such. They represent that 'speaking in other tongues' within the United States itself that, I argued above, characterizes the most recent development in biblical criticism and reflects the postmodernist turn at large: *a world in which readers become as important as texts and in which models and reconstructions are regarded as constructions*; a world in which *there is no master narrative but many narratives in competition* and no Jerusalem but many Jerusalems; a world in which the fundamental problem lies not in the translation and dissemination of a centralized and hegemonic message into other tongues but rather in having the different tongues engage in critical dialogue with one another" (Segovia and Tolbert, *Reading from This Place*, 32; emphasis added). See also Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*

not be the only or even the most important assumption driving our understanding of the reading experience. Instead, a responsible reading strategy for the NT narratives should seek to balance the concerns of elements such as Greek grammar and syntax, textual details, and sociopolitical backgrounds (the concerns of historical critics) with an appreciation for literary elements such as rhetorical strategy, irony, and character development (the concerns of literary critics).

Literary critics have recognized that the text speaks to the reader through a construct known as the implied author. The implied author is “the author who emerges through the story, as opposed to the actual writer.”⁹ The implied author informs the reader of the succession of events, the interaction between characters, and any other action that takes place at a given time in the narrative. The real reader, in most instances, will never have contact with the real author of a given work, and this is certainly true of the modern reader’s experience with the Gospel of John. The implied author then is that intratextual component of the narrative that emerges as the real reader encounters the events, characters, and temporal flow of the story.

I have already asserted the importance of balancing what the real reader brings to the text with what the text presents to the reader. While the real reader brings a host of experiences and perspectives to the text, there is in the text another intratextual phenomenon known as the implied reader.¹⁰ The text speaks *through* the implied author *to* the implied reader with the real reader as a witness to that discourse. Chatman writes that the “counterpart of the implied author is the implied reader—not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself. Like the implied author, the implied reader is always present.”¹¹ Likewise, Moloney describes the implied reader as a “heuristic device used to trace the temporal flow of the narrative,” and comments that

9. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 14.

10. There is a wealth of information concerning the implied reader in Staley, *Print’s First Kiss*. While I find implausible Staley’s thesis regarding the unreliability of the narrator and the victimization of the reader in John’s Gospel, it is undeniable that this volume contains many other helpful insights related to narration and the implied reader.

11. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 149–50. For an insightful discussion of the reader and the narrative’s effect on the reader through constructs like the implied reader, see Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 119–47.

the implied reader “emerges as a forward-looking textual effect that also knows and recalls what has happened and what has been revealed in the story so far.”¹²

While the reading experience of each real reader will invariably be different, the implied reader within the narrative consistently perceives the message of the implied author correctly. In a manner of speaking, the implied reader “gets it right” every time.¹³ The real reader witnesses the events as reported by the implied author to the implied reader. Through this exchange, the real reader experiences the rhetorical flow of the text.

This study will attempt to read individual pericopes in a way that will draw out the message of the Fourth Gospel in the exchange between the implied author and the implied reader, while at the same time drawing upon the insights of historical-critical scholarship. In what follows then, I will be concerned with the nuances of the Greek text,¹⁴ textual criticism,¹⁵ sociopolitical backgrounds, and other such factors, but only as they serve to inform the overall literary effect of the Fourth Gospel.

The remainder of this chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will outline a general approach to understanding characterization in narrative literature. The second section will be devoted to a specific discussion of characters in the Fourth Gospel and how they fit into the narrative scheme provided by the implied author. The final section of this chapter will examine the importance of the Johannine prologue (1:1–18) for understanding and appreciating the array of characters presented in the Fourth Gospel. All of this will pave the way for a discussion of individual characters in the chapters that follow.

12. Moloney, “Who Is ‘the Reader’ in/of the Fourth Gospel?” 21.

13. Culpepper groups the implied reader into the category of “ideal narrative audience” and distinguishes that from a hypothetical narrative audience and the author’s intended real audience. Arguing that the implied reader always properly perceives the implied author’s message, he writes, “In John the ideal narrative audience adopts the narrator’s ideological point of view, penetrates the misunderstandings, appreciates the irony, and is moved to fresh appreciations of transcendent mystery through the gospel’s symbolism” (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 208).

14. Unless otherwise specified, all references to the Greek text in this study are to NA²⁷.

15. All textual issues will be discussed from a consciously reasoned-eclectic position. Thus, each reading will be taken on its own merits and equal consideration will be given to external and internal criteria.

Defining Characterization: Clarifying Methodology

Increasingly, biblical scholars have been using literary methods to raise important questions about the nature of characters and characterization in biblical narrative. For instance, are readers to understand a character as a real person or as a mere construct of words and ideas?¹⁶ Further, are characters to be understood as having a correspondence to reality, or are they to be viewed as plot functionaries guiding the story to a specific end and guiding the reader to a desired response?¹⁷ In the case of the canonical Gospels, are readers to understand the characters as mere actants, as historical individuals, or as something altogether different?¹⁸ These questions must be answered in order to set forth a general understanding of characterization in narrative literature and, more importantly, before proceeding to a focused discussion of Johannine characterization.

Purist, Realist, or Something Else?

The debate over “realist” and “purist” approaches to defining character is an important area of discussion among literary critics.¹⁹ The realist ap-

16. Addressing this distinction, Chatman (*Story and Discourse*, 118) comments that the “equation of characters with ‘mere words’ is wrong. . . . Too many mimes, too many captionless silent films, too many ballets have shown the folly of such a restriction. Too often do we recall fictional characters vividly, yet not a single word of the text in which they came alive; indeed, I venture to say that readers generally remember characters that way.” He goes on to argue the case for a middle ground between understanding characters as “words” and understanding them as real persons.

17. Marvin Mudrick (“Character and Event in Fiction,” 211) writes, “One of the recurring anxieties of literary critics concerns the way in which a character in drama or fiction may be said to exist. The ‘purist’ argument—in the ascendancy nowadays among critics—points out that characters do not exist at all except insofar as they are part of the images and events which bear and move them, that any effort to extract them from their context and to discuss them as if they are real human beings is a sentimental misunderstanding of the nature of literature. The ‘realistic’ argument—on the defensive nowadays—insists that characters acquire, in the course of action, a kind of independence from the events in which they live, and that they can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context.”

18. Culpepper (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 105–6) provides a helpful discussion of this question.

19. Another way of describing this debate is to make a distinction between “mimetic” representations (i.e., representations of reality) or mere plot functionaries (i.e., actants that simply serve to continue the action of the plot). Chatman’s discussion of these distinctions in *Story and Discourse*, 108–27, is the logical starting point for one

proach argues that characters “acquire an independence from the plot in which they occur, and that characters can be discussed apart from their literary contexts.”²⁰ This means that in many instances characters are extracted from their narrative worlds and treated as real people in hypothetical situations in the real world. This approach is primarily associated with the Romantic writers of the nineteenth century,²¹ and though it finds fewer advocates today among theoreticians it is quite common among those who discuss characterization at a popular or less technical level.

As an example, the realist approach might take Shakespeare’s Hamlet, extract him from his literary setting, and place him hypothetically into a modern setting, all with the intent of asking, “How might Hamlet respond in such-and-such a situation?” Hamlet’s psychological profile as revealed in the Shakespearean tragedy would be used to treat him as an autonomous individual in the twenty-first century. This approach would thus seek to analyze the character in question psychologically on the basis of what has been revealed about that character in his/her original literary setting.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the purist approach, which rejects the idea that characters can be taken out of their literary contexts or viewed in hypothetical, nonliterary situations as autonomous individuals. Advocates of this view would argue that Hamlet is necessarily defined by the literary parameters, events, time period, and characters associated with his own story. Thus, to remove him from his literary setting would be to create an entirely new character.

The purist view is, at its most basic level, derived from an Aristotelian view of character. According to Aristotle, “action” is the most important element in any dramatic presentation and the secondary element in the drama is the agent who performs the action.²² Practically speaking, the Aristotelian approach to characterization almost completely subjugates

wishing to gain a familiarity with a fair representation of both sides of the debate. See also Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel*, 50–58, for a detailed discussion of this distinction using the terms “mimetic” and “functional.”

20. Burnett, “Characterization and Reader Construction,” 4.

21. Conway (*Men and Women*, 50) notes that this view “saw characters as more or less autonomous beings who possessed motives, values, and personality, all of which were open to analysis by the critic.”

22. See the discussion of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 108–10.

the character to the action performed, and in so doing reduces the character to the role of a formless agent. Chatman notes that “Aristotle’s general formulation of character and characterization is not appropriate to a general theory of narrative, although, as usual, he provokes questions that cannot be ignored.”²³ If Aristotle’s categories raise the question of the character’s importance, the modern purist approach builds on that foundation by raising the question of the character’s autonomy apart from the narrative in which that character originally appears. Culpepper contributes a helpful point to this discussion:

[W]e must face the question of the legitimacy of treating the people described in a historical writing as characters. If the evangelist drew upon oral tradition which derived from those who knew the various people involved in the story and told of events which actually happened, is it not blatant distortion to apply the canons of fictional literature to the study of these people? On the other side, does it not distort the concept “characterization” to apply it to the description of persons in historical or biographical literature? These questions bristle with difficulties. . . . We are presently interested in characterization as the art and techniques by which an author fashions a convincing portrait of a person within a more or less unified piece of writing. *Even if one is disposed to see real, historical persons behind every character in John and actual events in every episode, the question of how the author chose to portray the person still arises.*²⁴

In that same vein, Scholes provides what is perhaps an overly forceful but necessary safeguard to overemphasizing the historicity of a given character in any narrative. He writes: “The greatest mistake we can make in dealing with characters in fiction is to insist on their ‘reality.’ No character in a book is a real person. Not even if he is in a history book and his name is Ulysses S. Grant.”²⁵

As helpful as the cautionary insights of Culpepper and Scholes are, they offer a position that so contrasts with the realist approach that a polarizing effect begins to emerge. This means that, as the views are presently formulated, one cannot simultaneously embrace the purist position and incorporate elements of the realist position, and vice versa. The two positions are formulated without any movement to the middle

23. Ibid., 110.

24. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 105; emphasis added.

25. Scholes, *Elements of Fiction*, 17.

from either camp. Rimmon-Kenan identifies the quandary in the following way:

Whereas in mimetic theories (i.e., theories which consider literature as, in some sense, an imitation of reality) characters are equated with people, in semiotic theories they dissolve into textuality. What remains? *If both approaches end up cancelling the specificity of fictional characters, though from different standpoints, should the study of character be abandoned, or should both approaches be rejected and a different perspective sought?*²⁶

I propose here that the answer is not, as Rimmon-Kenan suggests, to reject both views, but rather to take the best of both and to create a middle ground. That middle ground should see a given character's correspondence to reality, and balance that with an understanding that each character is unique to, and ultimately a product of, his/her literary environment.²⁷ This means that no character can be understood as a "real" individual apart from his/her narrative framework but that (1) each is understood to possess a certain level of autonomy within the context of the narrative; and (2) every character reflects some correspondence to reality, even if he/she is not understood to be "real." If we approach characterization in this way, we will see that the characters of the Fourth Gospel create sympathy among the readers as they are continually pushed toward a decision.

Round, Flat, or Something Else?

In his classic work *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster asks and attempts to answer whether characters should be viewed as human beings, historical persons, or something else altogether.²⁸ Prefiguring the conclusions of the purist camp, Forster concludes that characters should not

26. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 33; emphasis added.

27. Chatman (*Story and Discourse*, 119) ably expresses this "middle ground" when he writes that "a viable theory of character should preserve openness and treat characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions. It should argue that the character is reconstructed by the audience from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated by the discourse, through whatever medium."

28. "What is the difference between people in a novel and people like the novelist or like you, or like me, or Queen Victoria? There is bound to be a difference. If a character in a novel is exactly like Queen Victoria—not rather like but exactly like—then it actually is Queen Victoria, and the novel, or all of it that the character touches, becomes a memoir" (Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 71).

be extracted from the narrative and given unconditional autonomy.²⁹ However, Forster's deeper concern in posing the question is to understand how characters function with respect to the other elements of the narrative. It is in this context that he sets forth his well-known distinction between "round" characters and "flat" characters.³⁰

According to Forster, "round" characters are those prominent figures in any story that display a host of potentially conflicting traits, while "flat" characters are predictable and one-dimensional. Using these categories, one might refer to the Jesus of John's Gospel as "round" inasmuch as he displays a host of emotional characteristics and complex motivations.³¹ One might also refer to the uncomprehending characters of the Fourth Gospel as "flat" inasmuch as they are primarily defined by their consistent misperception of the mission and message of Jesus. To do this, however, would be to overstate the case.

While Forster's categories have proven to be helpful, many literary critics have found his dichotomy between round and flat characters to be problematic in that it too rigidly compartmentalizes characters that seem to exist on a larger literary spectrum. For this reason, the distinction between round and flat characters, though widely referenced, has fallen out of favor with many literary critics. Strict adherence to these two categories would, for example, fail to recognize the complexity in many of the minor characters found in the canonical gospels.³²

Seemingly flat characters can express genuine insights and be momentarily transformed into characters with multiple round edges.³³ In the Fourth Gospel this is particularly true of Nicodemus, who early in

29. Ibid., 100.

30. Ibid., 103–25.

31. For instance, Jesus cleanses the temple in a fit of anger (2:1–22), weeps at the death of his friend Lazarus (11:35), and is continually driven by the Father's will (5:16–44; 6:35–51; 8:16–29; 10:14–18; 12:27–50, among other passages).

32. In recent years, a number of helpful publications have appeared that focus on the role of minor characters in the canonical Gospels. See, for instance, Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*; Malbon, "Major Importance of Minor Characters"; and Conway, "Speaking through Ambiguity."

33. Rimmon-Kenan (*Narrative Fiction*, 61) comments, "A trait may be implied both by one-time (or non-routine) actions. . . . One-time actions tend to evoke the dynamic aspect of character, often playing a part in a turning point in the narrative. By contrast, habitual actions tend to reveal the character's unchanging or static aspect, often having a cosmic or ironic effect, as when a character clings to old habits in a situation which renders them inadequate."

the narrative displays an inability to comprehend Jesus's message and mission (3:1–15) but later appears as a follower of (or at least sympathizer with) the crucified Jesus (19:38–42). His seemingly flat characteristic of misperception is rounded by the narrator to indicate not just a new characteristic (i.e., belief) but rather a genuine, thoroughly Johannine transformation. Burnett expresses the issue well when he writes that it “seems best to speak of *degrees of characterization* in biblical texts, and to plot textual indicators on a continuum for any particular text, from words at one pole to ‘persons’ at the other pole.”³⁴ This continuum must include at least three categories: (1) *agents*, which have little or no development and function essentially to advance the plot; (2) *types*, which have differing levels of character development and typically reveal a prominent, mainly static trait; and (3) *full-blown characters* with differing levels of direct and indirect characterization. Each of these individual categories must also be understood to exist on a continuum.

Characterization and Plot Development

Before moving to a focused examination of Johannine characterization, one further issue requires discussion—the relationship of characterization to the action of the story. Characters do not exist in a vacuum. Without action there is no need for and, in fact, there can be no characters.³⁵ The relationship of character to action is important because not only does a given character initiate, respond to, and interpret the action of the story, such action is often the indirect means by which the narrator portrays that character. A character can be described or developed explicitly (e.g., “the man went away sad because he was very rich” [Luke 18:23]) and can also be developed indirectly through speech and action. This means that the critic must pay particular attention to all activity within a narrative in order to weigh the significance of words and deeds for a given character's overall development.

While characters can be developed through direct description, this is rare in the Fourth Gospel. Two such examples of direct characterization in the Fourth Gospel apply to the figure Judas Iscariot. The first example is found in 6:70–71, where Jesus comments that one of his dis-

34. Burnett, “Characterization and Reader Construction,” 19; emphasis added.

35. Henry James (“Art of Fiction”) famously wrote, “What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?”

ciples is a “devil” (καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν εἷς διάβολός ἐστιν). The ambiguity of this statement is cleared up in the following parenthetical aside of v. 71: “Now he said this about Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, one of the Twelve. For this one was about to betray him”; ἔλεγεν δὲ τὸν Ἰούδαν Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτου· οὗτος γὰρ ἔμελλεν παραδιδόναι αὐτόν, εἷς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα.

A second example is found in 12:4–6 where Judas is again presented in a negative manner, this time with increasing specificity. In v. 4 his name is followed by three descriptive phrases. He is again mentioned as Judas, the Iscariot (ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης), one of Jesus’s disciples (εἷς [ἐκ] τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ), the one who was about to betray him (ὁ μέλλων αὐτόν παραδιδόναι). In v. 5 the reader learns of Judas’s protest at Mary’s anointing of Jesus’s feet. He protests that Mary’s actions represent a gratuitous wasting of resources in light of the needs of the poor. Verse 6 goes on to provide what is possibly the clearest example of direct characterization in the Fourth Gospel. There the reader is informed that Judas was not genuinely concerned with the poor (εἶπεν δὲ τοῦτο οὐχ ὅτι περὶ τῶν πτωχῶν ἔμελλεν αὐτῷ), but that he was a thief (ἀλλ’ ὅτι κλέπτῃς ἦν), that he was keeper of the money box (καὶ τὸ γλωσσόκομον ἔχων), and that he would regularly steal from the money box (τὰ βαλλόμενα ἐβάσταζεν). In these three verses the reader gets a glimpse into Judas’s position among the Twelve and the motivation behind his words and actions. The reader is also a witness to two specific examples of Judas’s illicit activities: his present thievery and his future betrayal of Jesus. Such direct detail is rare in the Fourth Gospel where characters are concerned. More often, it is the reader’s job to grasp each character’s subtle nuances and respond appropriately. In John’s Gospel, these nuances are typically found in the report of a given character’s action, including elements of cognition and direct speech.

In the following chapters a strong emphasis will be placed on the dominant traits that arise from the reported speech, thoughts, and activity of each character. This approach will help to clarify that character’s place on the continuum of characters (e.g., agent, type, full-blown character) and also reveal the implied author’s hoped-for response by the reader to that character.

Approaching the Characters of the Fourth Gospel

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is the focal point from start to finish. He is the overarching concern of the story and is consistently portrayed in a developed and complex manner. He displays a broad range of emotions,³⁶ an awareness of things that neither the other characters nor the readers know,³⁷ and a driving motivation to remain steadfast in honoring the will of the “Father.”³⁸ With respect to the continuum of characters discussed above, Jesus is the only true example of a full-blown character in the Fourth Gospel.³⁹ It is difficult, though not impossible, to regard Johannine characters other than Jesus as possessing any true autonomy within the narrative. This is because their appearance is often too brief to allow for substantial development by the narrator.⁴⁰ Though the Fourth Gospel is the only canonical account to provide extended narratives around particular figures, each character is still somewhat like a lesser planet in the Johannine solar system revolving around Jesus.⁴¹

From the outset of the Gospel, characters such as John the Baptist (1:26–36), Andrew (1:41), Philip (1:45), and Nathanael (1:49) demonstrate this truth. These characters and others appear simply to confess something significant about Jesus in a way that is consistent with or different from what has previously been revealed in the prologue (1:1–18). Though the narrator reports the direct speech and cognitive awareness of these early characters, there is little significance for them beyond their initial appearances. Therefore, whether these characters

36. Among other emotions, Jesus displays indignation (2:12–22), grief (11:33–37), and distress (12:27–33).

37. See 1:47–51; 4:16–19; 11:1–44; 12:27–33; 13:18–30.

38. See 5:16–44; 6:35–51; 8:16–29; 10:14–18; 12:27–50; 17:1–26.

39. Koester’s three-dimensional model of Jesus’s characterization is helpful. He identifies John’s Jesus as a human being, a prophet, Messiah, and God incarnate. He writes, “This threefold pattern emerges repeatedly in Jesus’ words to his friends and foes, showing that it is essential to the Gospel as a whole. Although interpreters sometimes give primary attention to one element, such as Jesus’ divinity, each element has its own integrity, and it is through the interplay of all three aspects that the evangelist presents Jesus’ identity and mission” (*Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 39).

40. Culpepper (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 102) points to this fact: “Most of the characters appear on the literary stage only long enough to fulfill their role in the evangelist’s representation of Jesus and the responses to him.”

41. These extended narratives appear in the wider context of Jesus’s interactions with Nicodemus (3:1–21), the Samaritan woman (4:1–30), and the man born blind (9:1–41), to name just a few.

are identified as agents or types, they must necessarily be labeled as “minor characters.”⁴²

Scholars have approached the study of these minor characters from a number of different perspectives. Some have attempted to identify the so-called representative figures of the Fourth Gospel,⁴³ while others have examined the significance of anonymous characters alongside those who are identified by name.⁴⁴ Still others have examined the similarities and differences between John’s male and female characters.⁴⁵ Each of these approaches offers something of value to the study of Johannine characterization, and while this study attempts to stand on the shoulders of those contributions, I aim to move in a slightly different direction. Before establishing that direction I must briefly consider the strengths and weaknesses of these prior approaches and assess their value for the present study.

Representative Figures in the Fourth Gospel

The tendency to regard Johannine characters as symbolic of a specific group or a greater spiritual reality has been pervasive in the history of exegesis on the Fourth Gospel.⁴⁶ There are a number of advocates of this position from differing methodological viewpoints, and there is not space here for a discussion of each. However, from a modern literary perspective this approach would regard each character as possessing one discernible, dominant trait (e.g., belief, unbelief) that highlights one aspect of a proper or improper response to Jesus. Culpepper comments,

42. Conway (“Speaking through Ambiguity,” 324–41) provides a helpful analysis of the flaws in previous approaches to examining John’s minor characters.

43. See, for instance, the chapter “Representative Figures” in Collins, *These Things Have Been Written*, 1–45; and Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 33–77.

44. See Beck, *Discipleship Paradigm*. See also Watty, “Significance of Anonymity in the Fourth Gospel.” The helpfulness of this insightful study is remarkable in light of its brevity.

45. See especially Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel*. See also, in chronological order: Brown, “Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel”; Schneiders, “Women in the Fourth Gospel”; Rena, “Women in the Gospel of John”; Seim, “Roles of Women in the Gospel of John”; de Boer, “John 4:27: Women (and Men) in the Gospel.” Dorothy Lee offers a compelling treatment of gender and symbol in her work *Flesh and Glory*.

46. See Collins, *These Things Have Been Written*, 1–8, for reflections on the history of such exegesis.

When any of the minor characters conveys an impression of personhood it is usually the personification of a single trait: Thomas doubts, Pilate wrestles with the claims of truth and political expediency, Peter is impulsive, the Beloved Disciple is perceptive. . . . As a result, one is almost forced to consider the characters in terms of their commissions, plot functions, and representational value.⁴⁷

Culpepper's comments are somewhat problematic for the present study in that they tend to foster a general acceptance of Forster's distinction between round and flat characters.⁴⁸ I briefly examined above the temporary rounding effect associated with some of the minor characters in the Fourth Gospel, a phenomenon that contrasts with Forster's categories and with the representative approach.

Conway has also pointed out some weaknesses in the representative approach. Most notably, she writes that those who have attempted to identify the central trait of these representative characters have often come away with widely divergent conclusions. If these representative characters are truly one-dimensional and transparent, one might expect these dominant traits to be discerned more readily.⁴⁹

Indeed, many of John's characters are ambiguous at best and hold the potential to confound the reader. A prime example of this ambiguity is found once again in the presentation of Judas Iscariot. The representative approach might label Judas as a model of one whose loyalty to Jesus gives way to betrayal. But the reader has learned that Judas has been chosen by Jesus to be one of the Twelve and that he is also the one who would betray Jesus.⁵⁰ He is, in fact, presented as the betrayer from his initial appearance in the Gospel, raising the question of his legitimacy as a candidate for this group of disciples. How is the reader to interpret and respond to such ambiguity? These seemingly conflicting realities do not help the reader to identify definitively Judas's one dominant trait or symbolic significance.

In the end, the representative approach categorizes characters too narrowly in a way that fails to account for the complexity of many

47. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 102.

48. In fact, Culpepper does use Forster's categories to inform his discussion of Johannine characters. See especially *ibid.*, 102–3.

49. Conway, "Speaking through Ambiguity," 328.

50. *Ibid.*, 330–31.

Johannine figures. In addition, there is no uniformity or unanimity among those who have sought to identify what these figures represent. However, this approach does help to affirm the previous conclusion that many Johannine characters have a tendency to remain relatively undeveloped and demonstrate a certain degree of flatness. This helpful insight will inform the methodology used in the following chapters.

Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel

In a study of the role of anonymity in the Gospel of John, William Watty describes the remarkable precision displayed by the Fourth Evangelist in identifying characters in the Fourth Gospel by name, birthplace, parentage, etc.⁵¹ In addition, Watty recognizes the way in which the Evangelist meticulously identifies places, defines Semitic terms, and possesses knowledge of events beyond the scope of any character in the narrative. Against that backdrop, Watty finds compelling the instances where concern for detail is conspicuous by its absence—this includes the nameless, faceless, but literarily significant characters in John's story.

The analysis of anonymous characters in the Gospel of John has identified a phenomenon quite different from what can be seen in much narrative literature. Very often in narrative literature anonymous characters are merely actants who help to guide the action of the story. This is particularly true in the Synoptics, where the absence of a name is often an indicator of unimportance. Noting this trend, Beck comments,

[S]ome Fourth Gospel anonymous characters invert this tendency [in the Synoptics], occupy more textual space, and demonstrate narrative significance by their faith response to Jesus' word, a response of witness to the efficacy of his word. Among these anonymous characters are Jesus' mother, the Samaritan woman, the royal official in chapter 4, the infirm man in 5, the blind man in 9, and in spite of the textual problems raised by the pericope, the woman caught in adultery.⁵²

Those who might otherwise be regarded as unimportant seemingly become models of Johannine faith that is greater than those who are named directly. The mother of Jesus is a poignant example of this. Though her name is given as Mary in the Synoptic Gospels, she is never

51. Watty, "Significance of Anonymity," 209–12.

52. Beck, *Discipleship Paradigm*, 2. Beck's article "Narrative Function of Anonymity" is a distillation of select portions of his dissertation.

directly named in John. Few would argue, however, that her role is an insignificant one. In fact, some have identified the mother of Jesus as the first true example of Johannine “faith” in the Fourth Gospel.⁵³ Though she is anonymous she ultimately becomes paradigmatic for belief—the Gospel’s central theological emphasis.⁵⁴ Is it reasonable to conclude that the name of Jesus’s mother was unknown or unimportant to an author who took the time to record the name of an actant such as Malchus, the servant whose ear was cut off at Jesus’s arrest (18:10)? There must be some greater literary significance in John’s use of anonymity.

From an analysis of John’s nameless figures it is reasonable to conclude that anonymous characters are an important part of the Fourth Gospel’s approach to characterization. The importance of anonymous characters in John’s Gospel is a useful insight for the present study inasmuch as this study will examine characters with name and position (e.g., the disciples Thomas, Peter, Andrew, Philip, Judas [not Iscariot], a “ruler of the Jews” named Nicodemus, etc.) alongside an anonymous figure (the “woman of Samaria”). This reminder of the literary significance of John’s anonymous characters will guide our reading of John 4 where Jesus interacts with the unnamed Samaritan woman.

Male and Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel

While other studies have been devoted to discussing the role of select male and female characters in John, Colleen Conway’s dissertation provides the most comprehensive study to date of the literary effect created by John’s use of male and female characters.⁵⁵ After a systematic study of John’s important male and female characters, Conway concludes,

[T]he mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, Martha and Mary of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene are presented in a positive light, but in the presentation of men there is no consistency. Three of the men, Nicodemus, Pilate, and Peter are presented

53. For instance, see Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 66–70. Raymond F. Collins (*These Things Have Been Written*, 158–82) also alludes to Mary’s role as a model of faithful response to Jesus.

54. This theme pervades practically every chapter of the Gospel. An incomplete list of occurrences of πιστεύω used in reference to Jesus includes 1:7, 12; 2:23; 3:12–18, 36; 4:50, 53; 5:24, 46–47; 6:29–47; 7:38–39, 48; 8:24, 45–46; 9:35–38; 10:37–38, 42; 11:26–27; 12:11; 13:19; 14:1–2, 11–12; 16:9; 17:21; 19:35; 20:31. All but three chapters contain explicit references to belief in the mission and message of Jesus.

55. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel*.

negatively, in clear contrast to the women, but two of them, the man born blind, and the Beloved Disciple play positive roles. Indeed, the man born blind turns out to be the most outstanding character of all, second only to Jesus.⁵⁶

The present study is in substantial agreement with many of Conway's conclusions. Specifically, her conclusion that female characters are presented in a primarily positive way is quite helpful for the present study.

In what follows, I will examine six male characters (Thomas, Peter, Andrew, Philip, Judas [not Iscariot], and Nicodemus), three female characters (the Samaritan woman, Martha and Mary) and one male character group (the twelve disciples). I will not differ here from Conway's conclusion that female characters in the Fourth Gospel are presented in a positive light. Instead I will affirm and draw upon this important insight. This will help to demonstrate that the incidence of Johannine misunderstanding is not necessarily used for polemical purposes, which will in turn raise questions about the intellectual and spiritual failures of Thomas as he is understood by the community-conflict hypothesis. If female characters—who are consistently presented in a positive light—are also pictured as possessing a certain degree of spiritual incomprehension, then a case can be made that the Fourth Gospel is not specifically directing a polemic against any one character.

Uncomprehending Characters in the Fourth Gospel

Throughout the remainder of this study I will be considering named and anonymous, male and female characters that are undeveloped and primarily one-dimensional. Thus, I will draw upon the insights offered by those scholars surveyed above who have written on different elements of John's minor characters. However, the next four chapters of this study are specifically concerned with those characters that display in their interactions with Jesus a failure to understand some element of his message, mission, claims, or actions.

The role of misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel has been thoroughly investigated.⁵⁷ Misunderstanding is important to the overall

56. Ibid., 201.

57. Paul D. Duke's revised dissertation, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, is the starting point for understanding how the Fourth Gospel uses situational irony to create misunderstanding. See also Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis*; Carson, "Understanding

literary effect of the narrative and is often combined with verbal and/or situational irony to create a greater rhetorical effect. As much as Johannine misunderstanding has been discussed, there has not been a systematic treatment of Johannine misunderstanding as it applies to John's approach to characterization. Since the community-conflict position accuses the Fourth Gospel of directing a polemic against the *Thomas* tradition through the spiritually dull, uncomprehending character of Thomas, the examination of Thomas and other Johannine characters that exhibit a similar lack of comprehension seems especially pertinent. To evaluate properly the claims of the community-conflict hypothesis one must discern whether the characterization of Thomas is a Johannine anomaly or part of a wider literary pattern in the Fourth Gospel.

The greatest source of direct information about Jesus is found in the Gospel's prologue. These verses detail the origins and divine status of Jesus (1:1–2), his role in creation (1:3), his role as the light of humanity (1:5, 9), his position vis-à-vis John the Baptist (1:6–8; 15–18), his dominion over the created order (1:10–11), his rejection by “his own” (1:11), his incarnation and glory (1:14), and his revelation of the Father (1:18). These themes are woven throughout the remainder of the Fourth Gospel in a way that consistently points the implied reader back to the highly revealing prologue. Without the information provided in the prologue, the implied reader is destined to grope in the “darkness” that shrouds many of John's characters.

Each character in the narrative approaches Jesus with varying levels of understanding but no one approaches him fully comprehending the truths that have been revealed to the reader in the prologue. Thus, it is possible for the reader to evaluate the correctness of every character's interaction with Jesus on the basis of what has been revealed in the prologue. In order to gain a clearer understanding of how characters misperceive Jesus, we must look at what the reader already knows about Jesus. After an examination of these recurring themes it becomes clear that some characters simply misunderstand what Jesus is saying or doing and, in each case, the misunderstanding in question can be

Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel”; Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ*; Urban, *Das Menschenbild nach dem Johannesevangelium*; de Jonge, “Nicodemus and Jesus”; Richard, “Expressions of Double Meaning”; Smalley, “Johannine Son of Man Sayings”; and Schneiders, “History and Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel.”

traced back to a truth that has been revealed to the implied reader in the prologue. With that in mind, this study will argue that Thomas is just one example of the uncomprehending Johannine character and that the so-called anti-Thomas polemic is just one stitch in a larger narrative tapestry that serves the literary purposes of the Evangelist. To validate this claim further I turn now to an examination of the prologue.

Johannine Characters and the Role of John's Prologue

The implied author (narrator)⁵⁸ of the Fourth Gospel is omniscient.⁵⁹ He continually expresses an inside view of events and appears to have access to information that is beyond the scope of all characters within the narrative.⁶⁰ For instance, he knows whom Jesus loves (11:5; 13:1–3, 23; 19:26; 20:2), what Jesus perceives (6:6, 15, 61, 64; 13:1; 19:28), and when Jesus is troubled (11:33, 38; 13:1). He provides information about the beliefs (2:11, 22; 20:8), suppositions (13:19; 20:15), and memories of the disciples (2:22; 12:16; 13:28; 19:35). Not only does he show an awareness of things the characters and implied reader do not know, but he also “tells us what none of the characters could easily convey to the reader.”⁶¹ The implied author is able to guide the implied reader skillfully through a maze of reported activities, interactions, and conversations in the Fourth Gospel largely because of the qualities of omniscience and reliability.⁶² The implied author has the correct information in its entirety and faithfully—though not fully—disseminates that information to the

58. Literary critics typically distinguish between the narrator and implied author. Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art in the Bible*, 14) comments that it is “customary to make a distinction between the (implied) author and the narrator. It is the latter who tells us what is happening and which character is speaking at any given time. The former becomes known to us through what the narrator says, through the speech of the characters (which is formulated by the author) and through the organization of the narrative materials, plot, time, space, etc.” However, in the Fourth Gospel the two are indistinguishable. Therefore, the terms “implied author” and “narrator” will be used interchangeably throughout the remainder of this study.

59. See the insightful discussion of John's omniscient narrator in Pamment, “Focus in the Fourth Gospel.”

60. On the omniscient narrator within and outside of the Fourth Gospel, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 21–26; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 17–23; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 84–99.

61. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 25.

62. Here I reject Staley's argument that the implied author victimizes the reader by providing unreliable information.

reader. In contrast to the implied author, the implied reader is highly informed but not omniscient. The implied reader is given privileged information that characters in the narrative do not possess, and because of this inside view the implied reader is in a position to evaluate properly every character's response to Jesus. Scholars have long recognized that the primary source from which the implied reader of the Fourth Gospel derives privileged information is the prologue (1:1–18).

John's prologue has been the topic of seemingly endless scholarly attention. Some scholars have discussed the prologue's stages of composition, often identifying pre-Christian hymns or formulae behind its final form.⁶³ Others have tried to identify the prologue's literary structure.⁶⁴ Still others have spent considerable space discussing the prologue's Hellenistic background,⁶⁵ Jewish background,⁶⁶ and christological import.⁶⁷ I am presently concerned with the literary purpose of the prologue as it relates to both the final form of the text and its rhetorical impact on the reader.

The prologue sets the theological and literary agenda for the remainder of the Fourth Gospel. The implied reader of the Fourth Gospel is able to comprehend the meaning of Jesus's origin and mission in a way that the characters in the narrative cannot. This allows the reader to interpret and evaluate the various responses to Jesus. Since everything in the narrative necessarily revolves around Jesus and a given character's (or reader's) response to him, this means that the Fourth Gospel and its

63. This is the case in the work of Rudolf Bultmann (and it is especially true of his epoch-making commentary on the Fourth Gospel, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (originally published in German in 1941, translated into English and released as *The Gospel of John* in 1971). See also Robinson, "Relation of the Prologue"; Black, "Does an Aramaic Tradition Underlie John 1:16?"; Van der Watt, "Composition of the Prologue."

64. Culpepper, "Pivot of John's Prologue"; Staley, "Structure of John's Prologue"; Coloe, "Structure of the Johannine Prologue"; Hayward, "Holy Name of the God of Moses"; Viviano, "Structure of the Prologue"; Ridderbos, "Structure and Scope of the Prologue"; La Potterie, "Structure du Prologue."

65. Tobin, "Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation."

66. Borgen, "Observations on the Targumic Character"; Boyarin, "Gospel of the Memra"; Ashton, "Transformation of Wisdom"; Hanson, "John 1:14–18 and Exodus 34"; Kysar, "Background of the Prologue"; Baarda, "John 1:17b"; Mowley, "John 1:14–18."

67. Brown, "Prologue of the Gospel of John"; Carter, "Prologue of John's Gospel"; Fennema, "John 1:18"; Pryor, "Of the Virgin Birth"; Painter, "John: Christology and the Fourth Gospel."

characters cannot be understood properly apart from the information provided in the prologue.

A number of themes are introduced in the prologue and those themes reappear throughout the Gospel in the discourses of Jesus. For instance, the term “life” (ζωή) appears twice in 1:4. This term reappears in Jesus’s discussions with Nicodemus (3:15–16) and the Samaritan woman (4:14). Peter also uses the term at the end of the Bread of Life discourse in 6:68.⁶⁸ The next significant term in the prologue is “light” (φῶς), which occurs in 1:4, 5, 7, 8, and 9, and reappears in Jesus’s conversations with Nicodemus (3:19–21) and with the disciples as they prepare to return to Judea (11:9–10).⁶⁹ Other important themes from the prologue include “witness” (μαρτυρία/μαρτυρέω, 1:7, 8, 15),⁷⁰ “the world” (κόσμος, 1:9, 10),⁷¹ “truth”/“true” (ἀλήθεια/ἀληθινός, 1: 9, 14, 17),⁷² “belief”/“to believe” (πιστεύω, 1:7, 12),⁷³ “his own” (ἴδιος),⁷⁴ and “glory” (δόξα).⁷⁵ Pamment comments that “characters use these concepts in slightly different ways, allowing the narrator to indicate their full range of meaning, and this is the purpose of the dialogues.”⁷⁶ Throughout the narrative, characters appear as comprehending or uncomprehending to the degree that they grasp these themes from the prologue. As stated above, no one character fully grasps the truth behind these themes (except possibly the Beloved Disciple), and therefore every character is uncomprehending to a degree. However, several characters are explicitly presented as uncomprehending in order that

68. The term also occurs in 3:36; 4:36; 5:24, 26, 29, 39, 40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 63; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2, 3; 20:31.

69. See also 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 36, 46.

70. The nominal form appears in 1:19; 3:11, 32, 33; 5:31, 32, 34, 36; 8:13; 14; 17; 19:35; 21:24. The verbal form appears in 1:32, 34; 2:25; 3:11, 26, 28, 32; 4:39, 44; 5:31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39, 7:7; 8:13, 14, 18; 10:25; 12:17; 13:21; 15:26, 27; 18:23, 37; 19:35; 21:24.

71. See also 1:29; 3:16, 17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 7:4, 7; 8:12, 23, 26; 9:5, 39; 10:36; 11:9, 27; 12:19, 25, 31, 46, 47; 13:1; 14:17, 19, 22, 27, 30, 31; 15:18, 19; 16:8, 11, 20, 21, 28, 33; 17:5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24, 25; 18:20, 36, 37; 21:25.

72. ἀλήθεια appears in 3:21; 4:23, 24; 5:33; 8:32, 40, 44, 45, 46; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 17:17, 19; 18:37, 38. ἀληθινός appears in 4:23, 37; 6:32; 7:28; 8:16; 15:1; 17:3; 19:35. ἀληθής appears in 3:33; 4:18; 5:31, 32; 6:55; 7:18; 8:13, 14, 17, 26; 10:41; 19:35; 21:24. ἀληθῶς appears in 1:47, 4:42; 6:14; 7:26, 40; 8:31; 17:8.

73. See fn 54 above.

74. See also 1:41; 4:44; 5:18, 43; 7:18; 8:44; 10:3, 4, 12; 13:1; 15:19; 16:32; 19:27.

75. See also 2:11; 5:41, 44; 7:18; 8:50, 54; 9:24; 11:4, 40; 12:41, 43; 17:5, 22, 24.

76. Pamment, “Focus in the Fourth Gospel,” 73.

they might appear as foils for the teaching and activity of the Johannine Jesus. The narrator then uses the discourses of Jesus to shed light on the fuller meaning of these themes, often accomplishing this in a context where Jesus is instructing and correcting that character.

In the following chapters I will return to these themes and show how the uncomprehending characters fail to grasp them fully. I will also recognize several common elements in each pericope. First, Jesus speaks or acts in a way that is consistent with his mission from the Father, and does so in the presence of another Johannine character. Second, the character in question misperceives some element of Jesus's words or deeds in a way that requires instruction and/or correction. Third, Jesus speaks or acts again in an instructive and corrective way. Fourth, in each instance, one or more themes from the prologue are addressed, revealing the depth of the character's misunderstanding, which in turn more fully elucidates the truth about Jesus.

Because this study is concerned to examine Johannine characterization with a view to shedding light on another discussion (viz., the John-Thomas question) I will intentionally avoid overly technical terminology related to literary hermeneutics. My aim in the chapters that follow is to read the narrative closely while tracing the Fourth Gospel's presentation of uncomprehending characters. It is my hope that this approach will be helpful for illuminating the literary and theological purposes behind incomprehension as it is applied to characters in the Fourth Gospel, and that the results will prove helpful for the discussion of John's relationship to the *Gospel of Thomas*. I turn now to a consideration of Thomas in the Fourth Gospel, keeping in mind the methodology established above as well as the conclusions of Riley, DeConick, and Pagels.